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Title: The mutually constitutive relationship between place and identity: The role of place-identity in discourse on asylum seekers and refugees

Short title: Place-identity, asylum seekers and refugees

Research article

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Abstract

Recent discursive research has shown that constructions of place may function to regulate social relations and reinforce particular notions of belonging. However, extant discursive research on place-identity has so far neglected the mutually constitutive relationships between constructions of place and identity in legitimising people's presence. To address this gap, this study, undertaken in Scotland, applies the notion of place-identity to the discursive analysis of interviews with asylum seekers and refugees, people who work in organisations that support asylum seekers and refugees, and locals who live in areas where asylum seekers and refugees tend to be housed. The analysis suggests that constructions of asylum seekers' and refugees' countries of origin as dangerous, and the host society as relatively problem-free, function to constitute their identities as legitimate and to justify their presence in the host society. Moreover, constructions of place may work to portray refugees and asylum seekers as benefiting the local community and as belonging more than certain other locals. In contrast, constructing the host society as 'full' functions to oppose their presence through portraying them as not being able to belong. This demonstrates the mutually constitutive roles of place and identity in legitimising or resisting people's movement and belonging.

Key words: asylum seekers, refugees, discourse, place, identity, Scotland

Introduction

As the definition of a refugee hinges on a having a ‘well-founded fear of being persecuted’ (UNHCR, 2007, p. 16), having this persecution treated as ‘real’ plays a crucial part in the legitimisation of their presence in a host society.¹ That is, the construction of a refugee’s country of origin is constitutive of his or her own identity in the sense that the country must be portrayed as a genuine danger in order for the individual to be accepted as ‘really’ being a refugee. Moreover, constructions of the host society may function to justify or resist the presence of asylum seekers and refugees through presenting it as an appropriate or inappropriate place of refuge. However, research has yet to investigate the ways in which such constructions of place work to constitute people’s identities, particularly in relation to their legitimacy, making this an ideal topic for applying recent theoretical developments in social psychology regarding the relationships between place and identity.

Much of the discursive research in relation to asylum seekers and refugees has focused on the arguments for or against their presence in the country of refuge, notably Australia (e.g., Every, 2008; Every & Augoustinos, 2007, 2008a, 2008b) and the UK (e.g., Capdevila & Callaghan, 2008; Lynn & Lea, 2003). As argued by Potter and Wetherell (1987), evaluations are tied up with how the targets of evaluation are constituted; therefore arguments about the presence of asylum seekers and refugees are interrelated with the way in which asylum seekers and refugees are constructed through discourse (Blommaert, 2001). For instance, arguments in favour of the presence of asylum seekers and refugees may portray them as being in danger in their countries of origin and therefore in need of protection (e.g., Every & Augoustinos, 2008b). Conversely, arguments against their presence may portray them as ‘bogus’ or as posing a threat to the host society and therefore not deserving of protection (e.g., Lynn & Lea, 2003). Moreover, these arguments may be tied up with constructions of the host nation; for instance, presenting the nation as under threat may be used to argue against asylum

¹ For the purposes of this article, we will use the term ‘refugee’ to refer to someone who has been granted leave to remain on the grounds articulated by the Refugee Convention and ‘asylum seeker’ for those who have applied for asylum but have not yet had their claim determined (see UK Parliament, 1999).

seekers and refugees whereas presenting it as a place that offers people a 'fair go' may be used to justify their presence (Every & Augoustinos, 2008a). This suggests that there are close links between constructions of people and places within these arguments.

This being the case, the concept of 'place-identity' appears to have particular relevance to this topic. Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff (1983, p. 60) developed the original concept and defined it as 'a potpourri of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas, and related feelings about specific physical settings as well as types of settings.' In this regard they saw it primarily as a cognitive concept that was a 'sub-structure of the self-identity' (p. 59) and worked to define a person's broader identity through their relationships with place. Dixon and Durrheim (2000) critiqued this notion, suggesting that it ignored the rhetorical functions, discursive actions and political dimensions related to notions of place, and further developed the concept to address the relationships between notions of identity and the regulation of space. They argued that taking a discursive approach to place-identity facilitates an understanding of the way that notions of place feed into notions of identity, as well as highlighting the way in which place-identity is social in origin, being co-constructed with others, and that these identities are practices that have functions. Dixon (2001) developed this idea further, suggesting that discursive approaches should be used to understand the way in which geographies are organised to control, for example, inter-ethnic contact; in this regard he stated that: 'The history of collective relations in many societies is, at least in part, a history of struggles over geography' (p. 600). For instance, Durrheim and Dixon (2005) illustrated how particular constructions of place could function to justify continued segregation in the context of official desegregation in South Africa.

More recent studies have applied the concept of place-identity to further explore the way that constructions of place function to regulate social relations or reinforce notions of belonging (e.g., Bowskill, Lyons & Cole, 2007; Hugh-Jones & Madill, 2009; McKinlay & McVittie, 2007). However, this research has yet to explore the way in which particular constructions of place function to constitute people's identities, provide explanations of behaviour or ways of being, and thus work together to justify or discredit people's legitimacy and belonging. The current study extends the theoretical

understanding of place-identity through analysing discourse relating to the presence of asylum seekers and refugees, a group whose very identity and right to remain are tied up with constructions of place.

Methodology

Participants

To explore the various ways that people construct arguments relating to the presence of asylum seekers and refugees, the first author (a white, non-British man) undertook semi-structured interviews with a total of 42 people living in Glasgow, the UK local authority with the highest number of asylum seekers (Home Office, 2010), and an additional three professionals based in Edinburgh. In order to gather a variety of responses, a form of ‘purposive sampling’ (de Vaus, 1996) was used to recruit participants from three distinct groups. Seventeen participants worked in organisations that support asylum seekers and refugees and had substantial (i.e., generally at least one year) experience in the field; 13 were white Scottish or English and four were from Africa. Thirteen participants were white Scottish locals who lived in the areas where asylum seekers tend to be housed, having lived there for approximately 21 years on average. Fifteen participants were either asylum seekers (eight) or refugees (seven) from 11 different countries (all in Africa or the Middle East) who had lived in the UK for approximately six years on average.

Participants were recruited through a range of voluntary and public sector organisations, having been asked if they wished to take part in a research study on asylum seekers’ and refugees’ experiences in Scotland. Participation was voluntary and confidential. Scottish locals, asylum seekers and refugees received £10 for taking part. The first author’s university provided ethical approval for the study.

Interview process

Interviews took place on the organisations' premises. The first author provided both oral and written explanations of the interview process and participants provided written consent. The interview questions focused on the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in the host society, the issues they faced and the way they were perceived by the local community. Although the interview questions were similar across the interviewee groups, inevitably interviewees spoke about their own experiences and knowledge, so asylum seekers and refugees tended to speak about their personal experiences, professionals tended to talk about the context of their own work and those they have supported whereas locals spoke about people they had met as well as making comments about the presence of asylum seekers and refugees in general. The interviews ranged in length from approximately 10-87 minutes with an average of about 40 minutes. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed using an abbreviated version of Jeffersonian notation (Jefferson, 2004) commonly used in similar discursive research (e.g., Edwards, 2007; Hugh-Jones & Madill, 2009; McKinlay & McVittie, 2007). The interviewees have been assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Extract selection

We read through the transcripts several times and identified three key arguments in relation to the presence of refugees and asylum seekers: 1) those that justified their presence through portraying their countries of origin as dangerous; 2) those that justified their presence through portraying them as benefiting the host society; and 3) those that resisted their presence through portraying the host society as unable to support them. Although this should not be taken as being representative, the first argument was common across the three participant groups; the second argument was common to professionals and locals and less so to asylum seekers and refugees (because they tended to speak about their personal experience rather than make generalisations); the third argument appeared only twice, both times in interviews with locals (as, due to the recruitment process, most interviewees were positively disposed towards asylum seekers and refugees). Close reading of these arguments suggested that the notion of 'place-

identity' played a key role and therefore the analysis focuses on this aspect. Extracts have been selected to illustrate the way in which these various arguments functioned and are analysed with discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; McKinlay & McVittie, 2008), paying particular attention to the way that constructions of identity and place relate to each other in justifying or resisting the presence of asylum seekers and refugees.

Analysis

Places of danger and safety

This first extract is from an interview with a Scottish local and is in response to a question about how asylum seekers and refugees are seen by wider society. This extract deals directly with arguments regarding the legitimacy of asylum seekers and refugees in relation to problems in their countries of origin.

Extract 1: Local 1 (white Scottish man)

- 1 L1 before I came here (0.8) I'll class myself as the wider society
2 INT okay
3 L1 (.) I assumed they were (1.2) people looking for a cheap way of living (.) running
4 from their own country coz they had nothing then coming to the UK and (0.6) Italy
5 and Germany because we had plenty of money and we'd (.) give them it
6 INT (.) right
7 L1 that was the way I portrayed them (0.6) they were just selfish people just running for
8 where they get the best (0.8) but once I've come here and listened to a few stories
9 (0.8) I realised these countries have got problems, they've been splitting up families
10 they're war-torn (0.8) they're actually in fear of their (0.5) lives (2.0) so you realise
11 there is problems that they weren't just running away to get a better life they're (1.0)
12 they're running away because they had to (.)

13 INT right=
 14 L1 =they've had to leave their home they would probably like to go back to (.) if it was a
 15 better country

This response contrasts a previous state of misunderstanding – ‘I assumed’ (l. 3) – with a newer state of understanding – ‘I realised’ (l. 9). This portrays the original perspective as mistaken and the latter perspective as true, as only something true can be realised whereas something assumed can be either true or false. The two perspectives also offer two different constructions of asylum seekers and refugees, with related implications in terms of morality and responsibility. Narratives such as these not only describe a sequence of events but also allocate responsibilities and suggest causal links (Edwards, 1997; Sambaraju & Kirkwood, 2010). The first describes ‘them’ as coming to the UK for economic reasons whereas the second suggests that they fled due to the danger in their countries of origin. More specifically, within the first perspective the countries are contrasted in terms of wealth – ‘they had nothing’ (l. 4) whereas ‘we had plenty of money’ (l. 5) – and this is presented as a causal explanation for their behaviour (i.e., they migrated for economic reasons). This is further emphasised by the use of a personality ascription – ‘they were just selfish people’ (l.7) – that has negative moral implications – that is, they were only thinking of themselves. This, coupled with the statement in relation to the UK’s wealth – ‘we’d (.) give them it’ (l. 5) – implies both that they were only interested in their economic situation and they were getting something from the UK that they had not earned. Overall this has the effect of portraying asylum seekers and refugees as undeserving of entry to the UK, support or sympathy. This narrative may be helpfully considered as the ‘standard story’ of asylum seekers and refugees; that is, in common with the ‘standard story’ of indigenous rights in postcolonial countries, which tends to deny any responsibility on the part of the majority ethnic group (Kirkwood, Liu & Weatherall, 2005; Nairn & McCreanor, 1991), this narrative presents asylum seekers and refugees as ‘really’ economic migrants who neither need nor deserve asylum (e.g., Leudar et al., 2008).

However the second perspective undermines these implications. In particular, rather than discussing the countries of origin in economic terms they are described as having ‘problems’ (l. 9), which may include ‘splitting up families’ (l. 9) and being ‘war-torn’ (l. 10). This construction implies that other countries, such as the UK, are without these problems, and therefore are implicitly associated with safety. The statement ‘they’re actually in fear of their (0.5) lives’ (l. 10) presents this as real through the use of the term ‘actually’ (l. 10) (in contrast to what may be ‘assumed’). Furthermore, this ‘fear’ (l. 10) is presented as a state that can be contrasted with the previous description of asylum seekers being ‘selfish’ (l. 7), which functions as a causal explanation for them leaving their country in that they are afraid they may die if they stay. The upshot is then presented: ‘they weren’t just running away to get a better life they’re (1.0) they’re running away because they had to’ (ll. 11-12). This statement is hearable as implying that leaving for a ‘better life’ is less acceptable than leaving ‘because they had to’, partly portrayed through the use of the word ‘just’, which suggests the first reason bears less moral weight (Lee, 1987). More specifically, it suggests that people are culpable – and perhaps admonishable – if they choose to come to Britain for economic reasons; however, asylum seekers’ and refugees’ presence in the UK is legitimate given their lives were in danger and so they had no other choice.

In terms of place-identity, constructing the UK in terms of its wealth and contrasting this with the relative poverty of asylum seekers’ and refugees’ countries of origin functions to suggest that they are coming to the UK for economic reasons rather than due to persecution. Conversely, constructing their countries of origin as unsafe implies that the UK is a place of safety and therefore highlights the underlying issues of danger and asylum rather than economic motivations. These constructions of place are therefore constitutive of the identity of others, either as ‘selfish’ people who are only interested in wealth and are undeserving of access to the UK or as people who are really in fear of their lives and therefore in need of asylum.

This relationship between the construction of the host society, an asylum seeker’s country of origin and the asylum seeker’s own status as legitimate is made even more explicit in the next extract from an interview with an asylum seeker.

Extract 2: Asylum seeker 1 (Pakistani man)

- 1 INT what would you say that you've found most difficult since being in the UK?
2 AS1 (2.0) u::h (.) believe me I do not feel any difficulties in UK
3 INT okay
4 AS1 (.) and that's uh (.) people sorta think about that (.) that uh we have lot of difficulties
5 here (1.0) but I think (1.2) when I was in Pakistan I have a lot of problems, I told you
6 [about this]
7 INT [right] mm-hmm
8 AS1 (.) I came here (.) I told you before I feel relaxed
9 INT mmm
10 AS1 and then I put c- claim that (1.2) ↑when you put the claim↓ (1.2) why you put the
11 claim? (1.2) because you have problem in my- our country
12 INT yeah
13 AS1 (.) if have in your country problem (.) that's why you get claim here, after that (1.2) I
14 don't think so I get any difficulties

It is important to note that several of the asylum seekers and refugees interviewed stated that they had no or few difficulties and yet also described in detail some of the problems they faced. This apparent contradiction suggests that speakers are attempting to negotiate an ideological dilemma (Billig et al., 1988; Van den Berg, 2003). More specifically, it suggests that they may be negotiating the dilemma of making potentially critical remarks about the host society without seeming ungrateful or undermining their grounds for asylum (Kirkwood, 2012). Hugh-Jones and Madill (2009) illustrated similar dilemmas in relation to the place-identity of people who lived near an active quarry.

Here, the interviewee produces a narrative that uses a contrast to make the case that he has no problems in the UK: 'when I was in Pakistan I have a lot of problems [...] I came here [...] I feel relaxed' (ll. 5-8). In this way he manages the apparent contradiction through equating 'difficulties' with 'a lot of problems', which he associates with the situation in his country of origin, therefore justifying his presence in

the UK, while portraying any current issues as relatively unproblematic in contrast. The interviewee goes on to make a general case regarding asylum claims, problems in people's countries of origin and difficulties in the host societies: '↑when you put the claim↓ (1.2) why you put the claim? (1.2) because you have problem in my- our country [...] if have in your country problem (.) that's why you get claim here, after that (1.2) I don't think so I get any difficulties' (ll. 10-14). In terms of place-identity, the construction of the host society and the country of origin work to mutually constitute each other: presenting the UK as being a place without difficulties and the country of origin as a place with many difficulties works to constitute the former as an appropriate place of refuge and the latter as a legitimate place from which to flee. Moreover, these constructions of place are constitutive of the speaker's identity: he must be a genuine refugee if he fled problems in his own country and faces no problems now that he has found safety in the UK. The careful negotiation of this dilemma and the related constructions of place therefore work together in order to legitimise the interviewee's presence in the host society.

The following extract from an interview with a refugee further illustrates how constructions of refugees' countries of origin may function to legitimise their presence in the host society through emphasising the danger that they fled.

Extract 3: Refugee 1 (Iranian man)

- 1 R1 I (1.0) escape from my country, I have many problem (.)
- 2 INT mm-hmm
- 3 R1 with the government, the crazy government, Iranian (.) you know (0.6) they are
- 4 Muslim, ↑I was Muslim before↓
- 5 INT mm-hmm
- 6 R1 but uh (2.5) I never (0.8) wanted to be a Muslim (0.8) because I know them (0.8)
- 7 very well (2.8) they are very (1.0) I don't know what you call it (1.8) extremist? (1.2)
- 8 INT okay
- 9 R1 yeah very (.) dangerous people in government (.)

10 INT right
 11 R1 (.) I love my country but
 12 INT mm-hmm
 13 R1 (.) the problem (1.8) was the religious (.) government (.) I don't like them (.) and
 14 (1.5) when I came ↑here (1.5) I convert my (0.8) religion from Muslim to Christianity
 15 INT ah right okay=
 16 R1 =the big problem (.) in Iran if you (1.0) uh in Iran or some country (1.2) like Saudi
 17 Arabia like (0.6) Afghanistan, if you convert your religion from Muslim to (.)
 18 Christianity
 19 INT mm-hmm
 20 R1 they kill you
 21 INT right
 22 R1 yeah (0.8) everybody knows the Sharia law
 23 INT sure
 24 R1 (1.0) they will kill (2.0) and also I had a big problem with the government (.) you
 25 know very (1.0) political (.) problem with them (.)
 26 INT okay
 27 R1 (0.8) and I (1.8) finally (.) I could (.) escape from my country (.) come in here (1.5)
 28 and ↑I am very happy↓ here

Characterising his leaving of his country of origin as 'escape' (l. 1) gives the impression that he was in danger and that it was difficult to leave, and could be contrasted with a more 'neutral' description of 'left' that does not communicate the need to flee. The reasons for leaving are described as 'many problem' (l. 1); stating that it was a number of issues highlights the severity of the situation. Also, describing the government as 'crazy' (l. 3) portrays it as irrational and even dangerous, in a way that goes against ideal notions of government (e.g., fair, rational, considerate). The interviewee goes on to suggest that although he was affiliated with his country's religion in the past – '↑I was Muslim before↓' (l. 4) – he has now differentiated himself. Stating that he 'never (0.8) wanted to be a Muslim' (l. 6) protects against the accusation that his change of religion was a 'fraudulent' move in order to access asylum. The interviewee can be heard to

criticise the government through describing it as ‘extremist’ (l. 7) and as containing ‘dangerous people’ (l. 9) (see Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2009, on the discursive construction of ‘extremists’). The construction of the interviewee’s country of origin, and in particular the government, therefore functions to portray it as problematic and thus as justification for him having to leave.

‘I love my country but’ (l. 11) functions as a counter disposition (Edwards, 2007), suggesting he would not leave it voluntarily, and the section following ‘but’ – ‘the problem (l.8) was the religious (.) government’ (l. 13) – portrays the problem with the political situation as being the only explanation and cause for him having to leave. The danger of converting to Christianity is not stated as a possibility, but rather as a fact: ‘they kill you’ (l. 20). Furthermore, suggesting ‘everybody knows the Sharia law’ (l. 22) construes the danger as indisputable and widely known. In this context, constructing his own identity – someone who has converted from Islam to Christianity – as in clear contradiction to the portrayal of his country of origin functions to portray him as genuinely in need of asylum through construing Iran as somewhere he literally cannot live.

The interviewee completes the narrative by linking it back to his present situation in the host society: ‘finally (.) I could (.) escape from my country (.) come in here (l.5) and ↑I am very happy↓ here’ (ll. 27-28). Contextualising his current situation within a narrative of the problems and dangers of his country of origin works to portray it as legitimate. That is, his satisfaction is presented as resulting from having escaped problems in his country of origin, rather than from simply improving his general living conditions. This extract therefore illustrates how constructions of a speaker’s country of origin and their dispositions function to present the speaker as compelled to flee and to emphasise the impossibility of return, thereby legitimising their presence in the host society.

Overall the analyses of these extracts illustrated how they may function to justify the presence of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK through highlighting the reality of the danger they face in their countries of origin. The next section builds upon these

results by focusing on arguments relating to the benefits asylum seekers and refugees bring to the host society.

Places that benefit from asylum seekers and refugees

The following extract is from an interview with a Scottish local who is involved in advocating for the rights of asylum seekers. It addresses the benefits brought by asylum seekers in terms of the impact on the local community.

Extract 4: Local 2 (white Scottish woman)

- 1 L2 I always say that (0.7) this community (0.7) was brushed clean because we had quite
2 a nasty (.) time wi' drug (1.1) drug abusers
3 INT right=
4 L2 =etcetera (0.8) and when we got the asylum seekers (.) to me (.) it was family again
5 (0.7)
6 INT okay
7 L2 they came all right from all over different places and there was language problems,
8 yes (1.0) but they were so happy to get safety (1.0) and (0.5) the drug (.) dealers (.)
9 didn't get the flats, the asylum seekers got the flats so (.) me personally I was very
10 happy

This extract presents the arrival of asylum seekers as a benefit to the area through the use of a temporal narrative regarding their arrival and the contrast between them and other previous residents. In particular, saying that 'this community (0.7) was brushed clean' (l. 1) implies that the previous residents, or problems associated with those residents, could be considered 'dirty' or unwanted. This is strengthened through the describing the previous state as 'quite a nasty (.) time' (l. 1) which emphasises how unpleasant it was to have these problems in the area. More specifically, the problems are described as relating to 'drug abusers [...] etcetera' (ll. 2-4); this term is loaded with

negative connotations, and combined with the implications of being not ‘clean’ and being nasty, the presence of drugs abusers is portrayed as an undesirable aspect of the community.

In contrast to the ‘drug abusers’, asylum seekers are presented as constituting ‘family’ (l. 4). In the context of asylum policy, Goodman (2007) illustrated that portraying asylum seekers as ‘families’ associates them with positive connotations, which works to support their presence and criticise the use of harsh asylum policies. Similarly, in this extract the contrast between ‘families’ and ‘drug abusers’ – rather than, say, ‘asylum seekers’ and ‘locals’ – functions to present the asylum seekers as having a legitimate place in the community in a way that the ‘drug abusers’ do not. In the light of place-identity, the constructions of place (‘community’) and identity (‘families’) work together to legitimise the presence of asylum seekers while arguing against the presence of certain others. This is particularly interesting as it avoids categorising people in terms of their nationality, whereby people from a certain country may have a natural right to reside there, and instead draws on other attributes in relation people’s presence, so that people who might otherwise be described as ‘locals’ are actually portrayed as not belonging in a part of the host society.

Overall, this extract shows how constructions of place and identity, including asylum seekers, refugees and certain members of the local population, work together to justify presence and belonging. The final section continues this focus on place and identity by illustrating the way in which Scottish locals may argue against the presence of asylum seekers and refugees.

A place that is full

This extract illustrates how the presence of asylum seekers and refugees may be criticised through developing particular constructions of the host society. In this extract, the interviewee discusses the topic of asylum seekers and refugees coming into the local area and receiving accommodation and support.

Extract 5: Local 3 (white Scottish woman)

- 1 L3 I think the worst thing now is (1.8) we're all in a recession
2 INT mmm
3 L3 (2.0) and it's hard ya know
4 INT yeah
5 L3 it's hard to accept (1.0) people from another country
6 INT yeah
7 L3 when we're going through (.) the recession, we can't afford to do this and we can't
8 afford to do that
9 INT yeah
10 L3 (1.5) e:m so to take (0.9) refugees in (.) w- I think (1.6) my own opinion is (0.8) I
11 think we're (0.6) we're full to the gunnels
12 INT okay (.) right
13 L3 (0.9) and we cannae do it ya know we just (1.0) we can't do it

This extract begins with the interviewee locating herself and others in terms of the economic environment: 'the worst thing now is (1.8) we're all in a recession' (ll. 21-22). Although technically incorrect at the time of the interview, reference to the recession draws on connotations related to limitations on public spending, framing what follows in such a way that all allocation of publicly funded resources can be made accountable. In this section, the use of the collective pronoun 'we' is arguably important as it appears to differentiate between those in the 'in group' and those outside it. Because reference is made to 'people from another country', this 'we' can be heard as referring to British people (loosely defined) and therefore implies that public spending on those in this category takes priority over spending on those from other countries, including asylum seekers and refugees (see Billig, 1995). As argued by Billig et al. (1988), discussions around the allocation of resources to 'foreigners' takes on a nationalistic tone that distinguishes between 'our' resources and 'their' preferential treatment. In this construction, stating 'we can't afford to do this and we can't afford to do that' (ll. 28-29) – which stands in for a general limitation on what British people can do, perhaps both

with public and private funds – makes spending on others an impossibility. Indeed, the repetition of ‘we cannae do it’ / ‘we can’t do it’ (ll. 34-36) trades on the ambiguity of whether this means something is not possible or simply should not be done, constructing the taking in of asylum seekers and refugees as both impossible and not the right course.

This argument also involves a certain construction of the country: ‘we’re full to the gunnels’ (l. 32). This construction portrays a ‘symbolic equivalence’ between the geographic and the social concepts of the nation (Wallwork & Dixon, 2004, p. 33), reinforcing the precedence that citizens have in relation to ‘their’ nation. The economic and spatial constructions are brought together in a way that makes the exclusion of non-nationals appear as the only possible outcome. This closely parallels some British National Party discourse – a political party known for its strong opposition to immigration – who have opposed providing asylum through portraying the UK as an ‘overcrowded island’ (Goodman & Speer, 2007, p. 177). Similarly, Grillo (2005), in studying resistance to the housing of asylum seekers in an English town, illustrated that residents’ arguments often relied upon portraying the town as being incompatible with the presence of asylum seekers or otherwise unable to support them. This is in direct contrast to constructions such as that illustrated in extract 2, which presents the UK as an appropriate place of refuge through constituting it as having an absence of problems. Overall then this extract illustrates how the provision of asylum may be criticised through constructing the UK as having no capacity to accept people to enter the country as well as presenting local people as having priority over limited public resources.

Discussion

This article has illustrated the relevance of a discursive concept of place-identity (Dixon, 2001; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; Durrheim & Dixon, 2005) to understanding discourse relating to the presence of asylum seekers and refugees in a host society (e.g., Capdevila & Callaghan, 2008; Every, 2008; Every & Augoustinos, 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Lynn & Lea, 2003). Moreover, it has contributed to the theoretical and empirical work on place-identity (e.g., Bowskill et al., 2007; Hugh-Jones & Madill, 2009; McKinlay & McVittie,

2007; Wallwork & Dixon, 2004) by illustrating various ways in which constructions of place and identity can work together to legitimise or criticise people's presence. More specifically, particular constructions of place could achieve this through emphasising a particular frame of reference – e.g., in terms of economics or danger – that implied legitimate or illegitimate identities – e.g., 'economic migrants' or 'genuine refugees'. Furthermore, particular constructions of place could be constitutive of people's identities in the sense that portraying someone's country of origin as a place of danger functioned to construct them as a genuine refugee. Places of origin and places of residence were also shown to be mutually constitutive of each other, so that portraying a country of origin as 'dangerous' reinforced the host society as a place of safety, thereby justifying asylum seekers' and refugees' presence. Moreover, people's presence could be legitimised or delegitimised through putting forth particular constructions of place (e.g., 'community') that were either compatible (e.g., 'families') or incompatible (e.g., 'drug abusers') with specific identity categories. In this way, the analyses presented above help advance our understanding of the complex relationships between notions of place and identity in relation to social regulation and movement across boundaries with implications for political action and the constitution of communities.

These constructions played a particularly interesting role in terms of the accounts provided by asylum seekers and refugees themselves. Specifically, it appeared that they had to manage a dilemma in terms of the contradiction between talking about issues they faced and avoiding complaining about their current situation (Kirkwood, 2012; Kirkwood, McKinlay & McVittie, 2012). In this regard, constructing the host society as relatively problem-free and their country of origin as full of problems or dangers worked to constitute their own identity as a legitimate refugee. Moreover, constructing their situation in this way may also function to portray themselves as having a legitimate place in the host society and having a sense of agency (see also Colic-Peisker, 2005; Verkuyten, 2005). As illustrated by Hugh-Jones and Madill (2009), such constructions can function to minimise the existence of problems that people confront.

Constructions of place also played a role in the arguments against the presence of asylum seekers. For instance, portraying the UK as 'full' and drawing on commonsense

notions that a nation's resources should be allocated to its citizens functioned to construct the host nation in such a way that asylum seekers and refugees were portrayed as not belonging or not entitled to support. Whereas previous research has shown that asylum seekers' legitimacy can be undermined by challenging the genuineness of their claims (e.g., Lynn & Lea, 2003), the present analysis shows that alternatively this may be done through portraying the host society in a way that is incompatible with their presence.

Some researchers have suggested that policies are more likely to find support if articulated as being consistent with the national character (e.g., Boswell, 2005; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). However, in at least some of the extracts, the 'local community' was taken as the most important constituency, so that the presence of asylum seekers and refugees could be supported by presenting it as benefiting this group. This illustrates that the relevant constituency is not given, even in discussions of people who are commonly defined by their immigration status, and different levels or concepts of place may be made relevant in relation to certain contexts or arguments.

Overall, this article has built upon previous research and theory on the social regulation of space and belonging through illustrating the ways in which constructions of place can constitute identities in specific ways and make particular types of identities legitimate or illegitimate. This mutually constitutive relationship between identity and place – i.e., the ways that they work together to justify or discredit the presence of certain groups or individuals – is important for understanding social relationships and the movement of people both internationally and at the community level.

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